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SIPDIS

STATE FOR OES/PCI, OES/IHA AND S/GAC

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [EAID](#) [ECIN](#) [KHIV](#) [SENV](#) [SOCI](#) [TU](#)

SUBJECT: BLACK SEA STATES TO CREATE NETWORK TO COMBAT AIDS  
OUTBREAK

1. Action Request -- See para 7.

2. Summary: The Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC), in cooperation with UN agencies, wants to establish a regional network to address the growing risk of an AIDS outbreak in the Black Sea region. The concept has been endorsed by BSEC Foreign Ministers; BSEC hopes the network will help focus attention by the individual national governments and galvanize regional information-sharing and cooperation. BSEC and UN representatives will meet in March to put the project in motion. They are eager for U.S. participation in that meeting and in the ongoing work of the network. End Summary.

3. AIDS Threat: BSEC and local UN officials are increasingly concerned about growing warning signs of an impending AIDS outbreak in the region. Ankara-based UNICEF coordinator Mehmet Kontas, the chief UN official working on the network, said that national governments are aware of the risks but their responses have been generally poor. He said Turkey, for example, continues to stand by official reports that AIDS cases have remained flat at about 1400 in recent years, when NGOs and the UN think that the number is much larger and poised to increase more. He pointed out that there are 20,000 unregistered sex workers in Istanbul alone ) many of whom come from Russian, Ukraine and Moldova, where higher infection rates prevail ) and Turkey is an important corridor for illegal immigration, and trafficking in drugs and humans. The police reported the arrest of 13,335 criminals last year involved in smuggling/trafficking operations. 34,072 persons were detained in connection with human trafficking.

4. BSEC Initiative: The BSEC is a relatively new regional organization comprised of 11 countries in the extended Black Sea region (Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Georgia, Greece, Moldova, Romania, Russia, Turkey, Ukraine). It includes 330 million people and several countries at risk of an AIDS epidemic. Although many of the member government have been slow to act against AIDS, BSEC foreign ministers endorsed a proposal to establish a regional network to address the threat. BSEC is working closely with UN officials, who will provide technical expertise for the project.

5. The objective is to create a Network of Liaison Experts from the BSEC Member States, supported by experts from relevant UN agencies. The network hopes to foster cooperation on surveillance, testing and treatment, awareness raising and capacity building. The first meeting will be held in March in Istanbul. BSEC member representatives will make presentations about the extent of AIDS in their countries and national efforts to address the problem. BSEC expects that initial costs to establish the network will be about USD 15,000. (Note: BSEC is not asking for U.S. financial support.)

6. We believe this is a serious and worthy undertaking. BSEC is an underutilized regional organization. It provides an important institutional framework to quickly establish the network, and it can muster support at the highest level in the member governments. The enthusiastic support and technical expertise of the UN significantly improves the prospect that the network could prove an important tool in the fight against the AIDS pandemic in the region.

7. Action Request: This is an important initiative for this region. BSEC provides a unique institutional capability to bring together the greater Black Sea states to help them address what could be a very serious AIDS outbreak in just a few years. We think this initiative is especially important for Turkey, which continues to lowball the incidence of AIDS cases and ignore the very real threat that AIDS could break out here. We support this initiative and urge Washington to do so, as well. BSEC and the UN recognize the leading role

of the U.S. in combating the spread of AIDS and they are eager for U.S. representatives to show their support for the initiative and lend their experience and technical expertise.

BSEC would like the U.S. to make a presentation at the preliminary meeting of the network in March. We recommend that OES and S/GAC identify a speaker or perhaps a small delegation to attend the meeting of experts in March. Post will transmit more details as they become available.

EDELMAN